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# THE JOURNAL OF POLITICAL ECONOMY

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## THE ANTHRACITE MINERS' STRIKE OF 1900.

THE practical unanimity with which the employees in the anthracite coal industry stopped work on September 17 and the few days following; the deliberation with which the movement leading to the strike was conducted; the completeness with which for thirty-six days the suspension of work was maintained; and the fact that important concessions were soon made by the operators, all tend to discredit the statement industriously spread at the beginning of the strike, that the workmen were led into an unjustifiable conflict by "outside agitators," and to confirm the belief that there existed conditions of employment very generally considered by the miners themselves as onerous. Many familiar with these conditions have wondered, not that a strike should have been instituted against them, but rather that it should have been so long deferred. A careful examination of the position of the workingmen will show, however, that it was only by a fortunate combination of circumstances, such as has recently occurred, that they had any chance of securing better conditions by means of a general strike.

The foremost of the difficulties the miners have had to contend with has been the absence for many years of any efficient

organization among them. From 1868 to 1875 the men had been very generally organized under the name of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association. During this period the association was recognized by the operators, and with its officers agreements were made, sometimes without a struggle, more often after each side had suffered severely from a stoppage of work. In 1875, when the operators found themselves at last under the necessity of making a considerable reduction of wages in consequence of the long depression, a bitter conflict was entered upon which lasted for six months, and ended in the destruction of the union. Nothing short of this would have satisfied the operators. They had been in the grip of the association for eight years, and had good cause to fear and hate its power. Unfortunately for the workmen, this period of organization coincided with that of the secret society known as the "Molly Maguires." Every breaker burned or murder committed by this band of ruffians weakened public sympathy for the miner, bound the operators more closely together, and deepened the hostility with which they looked on every form of miner's association.

For ten years after the crushing defeat of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association, the miners were practically without organization. During the early '80's a new union, under the name of the Miners and Laborers' Amalgamated Association gained some strength in the lower and middle fields, and at the same time the Knights of Labor were establishing themselves in the neighborhood of Scranton. In September 1887, in an attempt to secure a readjustment of wages and the recognition of the organization, the Knights of Labor brought on a strike in the Lehigh region which extended in January 1888 to the southern field. The employees on the Reading Railroad became involved. After a long struggle the organization of the miners was again completely broken. From that time to the present year hardly anything had been accomplished by way of organization. A record of pitiable failures to accomplish desired ends, skillfully fostered religious and race differences, the presence

of a new and largely non-English speaking population, the general hopelessness of the miners' situation, and above all the well-known hostility of the operators have combined to discourage organization. For the past five or six years the United Mine Workers of America have been in the region, at one time enrolling, it is said, 10,000 members in the Lehigh and Wyoming regions.<sup>1</sup> This membership was largely lost in 1898. In 1899 and the first half of 1900, in spite of the work of "national organizers" sent into the region, there was, on August 27, the date set by the mine workers for the proposed joint conference at Hazleton, a membership of not more than 8000 out of a mining population of 140,000.<sup>2</sup> At this meeting at which the operators did not appear, it was determined to ask the National Council of the union for permission to strike. While this petition was being considered organization went rapidly on, and as a strike appeared more and more to be inevitable the union gained in numbers. By September 17, or within a few days thereafter, the anthracite region was thoroughly organized under one union more firmly than it had been since the brightest days of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association in the early '70's.<sup>3</sup>

This much of the earlier conditions it has seemed necessary to present in order to show (1) why during recent years there has been no effective movement among the anthracite miners, and (2) to throw some light on the question as to what is likely to be the attitude of the operators toward the union in its present form.

The scope and nature of the miners' grievances may be seen from the demands on the basis of which they struck. They are as follows: An increase of wages for those laborers receiving less than \$1.50 per day of 20 per cent., for those receiving from \$1.50 to \$1.75, 15 per cent., and for all receiving more than \$1.75, an advance of 10 per cent., a slight advance on the old

<sup>1</sup> *The United Mine Workers' Journal*, November 8, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN MITCHELL, in the *Independent* (New York), November 1, 1900.

<sup>3</sup> For a fuller account of the early labor organizations in the anthracite region, see the present writer's article in the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, November 1897.

scale of contract work of various kinds ; the sliding scale of wage payment where it was in operation to be abolished ; a reduction in the price of powder to be made from \$2.75 per keg to \$1.50 ; the discontinuance of the company store and the company doctor ; compliance with the semi-monthly wage payment law ; the establishment of a system of weighing the coal raised, and the provision for a check-weighman to be paid by the miners ; and the establishment of certain safe-guards to prevent favoritism.<sup>1</sup>

The most important demands were made, it will be seen, in connection with wages. On this subject the most conflicting reports have been circulated, as indeed they might be within the bounds of truth. It is difficult to make any general statements that will hold for all classes of workmen in all parts of the anthracite region. Some valuable data were officially collected by Mr. A. S. Bolles in 1888, showing the wages and earnings of all the contract miners at eighteen selected collieries. His method was to divide the miners into ten classes, according to their earnings, and give the average daily earnings of each of these classes. The result was as given in the table below.<sup>2</sup>

CLASSES OF CONTRACT MINERS AT EIGHTEEN COLLIERIES, WITH THE AVERAGE DAILY WAGES OF EACH CLASS, IN DOLLARS.

Colliery Number	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	Sixth	Seventh	Eighth	Ninth	Tenth	Contract Miners in each class
1	2.64	2.35	2.15	2.00	1.92	1.85	1.77	1.69	1.61	1.43	15
2	3.02	3.33	3.29	3.25	3.20	3.14	3.08	3.01	2.88	2.45	14
3	3.00	2.78	2.69	2.63	2.51	2.42	2.34	2.21	2.07	1.82	7
4	2.08	2.43	2.32	2.17	2.07	1.97	1.88	1.78	1.66	1.49	8
5	4.34	3.41	3.09	2.90	2.75	2.57	2.38	2.23	2.03	1.64	7
6	4.58	3.26	3.06	2.98	2.87	2.61	2.77	2.73	2.64	2.49	12
7	2.87	2.23	2.10	2.00	1.92	1.82	1.73	1.65	1.58	1.39	20
8	3.60	3.07	2.92	2.73	2.64	2.56	2.49	2.42	2.27	1.97	7
9	3.82	2.93	2.64	2.52	2.39	2.28	2.19	2.11	1.95	1.55	9
10	3.63	2.81	2.51	2.33	2.19	2.09	2.02	1.94	1.85	1.68	9
11	4.43	3.96	3.68	3.47	3.12	2.70	2.46	2.39	2.22	2.13	3
12	4.02	3.26	3.15	3.07	3.00	2.96	2.91	2.83	2.70	2.34	15
13	4.22	3.74	3.52	3.42	3.35	3.24	3.16	3.08	2.91	2.60	14
14	3.19	2.95	2.78	2.67	2.59	2.48	2.38	2.24	2.12	1.85	8
15	3.02	2.97	2.69	2.49	2.36	2.22	2.11	2.03	1.88	1.53	10
16	2.92	2.33	2.19	2.06	1.89	1.77	1.64	1.52	1.31	1.12	11
17	3.28	2.64	2.42	2.32	2.25	2.18	2.11	2.00	1.85	1.21	26
18	2.81	2.30	2.08	1.95	1.88	1.82	1.77	1.71	1.61	1.28	..

For a comparison of these wage rates with those of Pennsylvania bituminous miners see the *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, November 1897.

<sup>1</sup> Pottsville *Miner's Journal*, September 13, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *Report of the Secretary of Internal Affairs of Pennsylvania*, 1888, Part III.

These figures show the average wages of about 2500 miners. They are probably somewhat higher than a similar examination would show in 1900, though fairly representative of the wages of this class of mine workers. It will be noted that they vary widely, not only for different collieries, but in the same colliery. These variations are due to the difference in skill of the miners, and to the different conditions under which the work is done. Some of the contract work is done by the yard and some by the car or ton, and the price for each kind of work varies with the thickness of the vein, its pitch, the nature of the roof, the distance coal must be moved before reaching the car, the method of making such movement, and so on. The same complexity exists in the method of paying for timbering the various kinds of passages. It may be remarked in passing that while the conditions making inequalities inevitable, and leave opportunities for the favoritism complained of by the miners, it would be difficult to adopt any scale of payment that could be applied equitably to large districts.

These wages are surprisingly high in view of the complaint of low wages so frequently heard. But it must be remembered that these are the wages of the most skilled and best paid labor at the mines, and that they have in them something of the undertaker's profits. Each miner employs one or more laborers to assist him, he must supply powder, fuses, and other materials, and must take much risk on the nature of the breast of coal or seam of rock he is working. His wages are whatever is left after deducting the expenses mentioned. If we wish to get the rate of pure wages for this grade of work we must take the case of the few miners who work by the day. The most common rate for these during the past few years has been nominally \$2.00 per day in the Schuylkill region and \$2.10 in the Lehigh region. No figures are at hand for the northern region. These are no doubt below the average received by the contract miners, but they have been subject to increase and decrease by the operation of the "sliding scale" soon to be described, in both the southern and middle regions.

The miners' wages have thus far been discussed. The miners, however, constitute only about one fourth of the employees about the mines, as will be seen by the table given below.<sup>1</sup> The "inside laborers," another important class, nominally received \$1.70 in the Schuylkill region and \$1.80 in the Lehigh region. The "outside laborers" who work above ground about the breaker received in the Schuylkill region \$1.35.<sup>2</sup> With the other classes of workers given in the table the wages vary so much as to make an average or usual rate difficult to find.

The rates for day miners and for laborers given above were not the rates actually paid, but the so-called "basis rate." All wages and all contract prices, whether for a car of coal, a yard of tunnel driven, or a timber placed, have for a generation been determined in the Schuylkill and Lehigh regions by the prices received for coal. The abolition of the "sliding scale" was one of the demands of the miners, and to a consideration of that system we now turn.

The sliding scale was first introduced into the region in 1869 through the efforts of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association. This was one of its first victories. For several years it was the subject of frequent dispute, and underwent various changes. By 1874 or 1875 the system received the form which has continued to the present year. It applied only to the southern and middle fields and the plan differed widely in the two fields.

<sup>1</sup> The various classes of laborers at the anthracite mines, with the number employed in each class in 1898, is shown in the following table. See the mine Inspector's Reports for 1898.

INSIDE EMPLOYEES.					OUTSIDE EMPLOYEES.				
Foremen	-	-	-	485	Foremen	-	-	-	382
Fire bosses	-	-	-	808	Blacksmiths and carpenters	-	-	-	2,056
Miners	-	-	-	36,376	Engineers and firemen	-	-	-	4,445
Laborers	-	-	-	23,960	Slate pickers	-	-	-	23,876
Drivers	-	-	-	10,267	Superintendents, bookkeep-	-	-	-	
Door boys	-	-	-	3,073	ers, etc.	-	-	-	442
All others	-	-	-	16,103	All others	-	-	-	19,680
Total inside	-	-	-	91,171	Total outside	-	-	-	1,249
Grand total	-	-	-	142,420					

<sup>2</sup> *Coal Trade Journal*, October 31, 1900.

In the southern or Schuylkill region a scale of wages was to be given when the average price of coal of certain sizes at Port Carbon, then an important shipping point near Pottsville, was \$2.50 per ton. As the price of coal advanced wages were increased at the rate of 1 per cent. for each advance of 3 cents per ton above \$2.50. A reduction of wages on the same scale was made as the price of coal fell below \$2.50. The miners have long been discontented with the system for several reasons. In the first place they, obviously interested in having the selling price on which their wages were based as low as possible, felt that \$2.50, which may have been a fair price in the days of a higher range of prices when it was adopted, has long since ceased to be fair inasmuch as it gives them little chance to profit by the sliding scale. In the second place they have thought themselves victimized by the high freight rates which the large companies—the Reading is the chief one in point—as common carriers charged themselves as operators. At any rate the miners have suffered a reduction more often than they have enjoyed an advance on the basis rate of wages. Since January 1, 1888, there have been 153 drawings, of which 8 resulted in paying basis wages, 44 in an advance upon that rate, and 101 in a reduction therefrom.<sup>1</sup> Moreover the prices have ranged farther below the basis than above it. The miners had another grievance against the system. They distrusted it because there was no way of knowing whether the faulty plan was even honestly

<sup>1</sup> The average price returned from the collieries to determine the monthly rate of wages for the Schuylkill region is here given for the years 1895 to September 1900. To find the rate of wages for any month add to or subtract from the basis rate, one third as many per cent. thereof as the number of cents by which the price given exceeds or falls below \$2.50.

AVERAGE PRICE IN DOLLARS FOR THE MONTH OF

Year	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	April	May	June	July	Aug.	Sept.	Oct.	Nov.	Dec.
1895 - - -	2.18	2.22	2.24	2.19	2.05	2.04	2.02	2.04	1.97	2.17	2.25	2.37
1896 - - -	2.26	2.36	2.50	2.49	2.46	2.43	2.53	2.56	2.60	2.63	2.74	2.70
1897 - - -	2.66	2.61	2.63	2.67	2.50	2.55	2.60	2.68	2.66	2.66	2.65	2.61
1898 - - -	2.44	2.46	2.46	2.42	2.32	2.36	2.40	2.39	2.30	2.25	2.27	2.32
1899 - - -	2.32	2.26	2.26	2.39	2.34	2.31	2.39	2.32	2.40	2.41	2.56	2.63
1900 - - -	2.76	2.63	2.55	2.46	2.46	2.43	2.41	2.49	2.67			



executed. While the Workingmen's Benevolent Association existed, the miners had representatives at the monthly drawings of the five collieries, the average selling price of whose product was to determine their wages. With the collapse of the union in 1875 this safeguard, as they deemed it, was destroyed. Since then the drawings have been made by Reading officials and a notice of the result posted at the collieries by them.

A different scale prevailed in the Lehigh region. When coal sold for \$5 a ton a tide basis wages were paid. As the price fell, 1 per cent. was taken off these wages for each ten cents decline in price. Thus miners' wages of \$2.10 per day quoted above, were paid when coal sold at \$5 at tide water. When coal sold at \$4.50, 5 per cent. of the wages were deducted and so on. Wages in this district were permanently below the basis rate under this plan. The miners in both districts distrusted the returns made, and had come to regard the deduction from their nominal wages as arbitrary exactions made by the companies. The conditions existing when it was adopted have long since passed away and the men were doubtless right in insisting upon its abolition. It will result in a better rate of wages, one that is known beforehand, and it will remove a long existing element of distrust.

No adequate conception of the wages question in the anthracite region can be had without considering the regularity of employment as well as the rate of wages. It would seem that for the severe and dangerous work of the mine the rates were not too high even when not subject to frequent reduction by the sliding scale. The most unfortunate feature of the problem is, however, that the mines are regularly idle for a great part of the year. For years the operators while fearing overproduction and taking means to prevent it, have continued to increase their productive capacity, till, it is estimated, the mines at the present time could produce 70 million tons; in 1898 they produced 47 millions; in 1899 54 millions. The means of restricting the output is the extremely wasteful one of running the collieries only part of the time. The average colliery time for

the whole anthracite region as given by the mine inspectors' report was 148 days for 1898 and 180 days for 1899. The average time given for all the collieries in those districts where the returns are complete for a series of years is as follows :

	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
First district -	172	182	179	165	153	174
Third district -	153	162	150	134	157	168
Fourth district -	153	162	150	134	157	168
Fifth district -	196	196	179	140	157	191

These figures and those given in the table below<sup>1</sup> show an improvement during the last year over previous years, and doubtless this improvement continued into the first half of 1900, though it is not likely to remain a permanent one. The annual earnings of the workman are therefore far below what should be expected from the daily wages paid. Mr. Bolles in the reports already referred to gives the annual earnings of many contract miners. They range from very low to very high, most falling between \$400 and \$600 in the very favorable year, 1888. These are earnings, it must be remembered, of the best paid workmen about the mines. They have the highest rate of wages, and their time, not being so dependent on the time the breaker runs as in the case of the great mass of inside and outside laborers, is longer. For the latter the possible annual earnings

<sup>1</sup>As there is some question as to the accuracy of these averages the following table is presented. It shows the actual number of days (omitting fractions) worked at that colliery in each inspector's district which in 1899 produced the largest output. Presumably these larger collieries would be worked more continuously than the smaller ones. An inspection of the tables given in the reports strengthens this presumption. The table follows :

NUMBER OF DAYS WORKED IN

District	Name of Colliery	1894	1895	1896	1897	1898	1899
1st	Oliphant - - - -	168.2	218.7	205.0	127.0	92.2	201.7
2d	Pyne - - - -	169.3	.....	177.5	176.9	185.9	192.0
3d	Harry E. & Forty Fort -	130.0	158.0	112.3	160.3	195.0	238.2
4th	Nottingham No. 15 -	125.2	147.2	113.8	115.7	114.2	184.3
5th	Coleraine - - - -	163.7	243.1	216.0	225.2	208.0	250.9
6th	Maple Hill - - - -	192.1	216.0	180.0	143.0	140.0	187.1
7th	Merriam - - - -	122.0	203.0	169.0	24.0	.....	184.1
8th	West Brookside - - -	230.0	235.1	244.0	185.7	195.8	211.4

must have been very low, when, with an extremely moderate wage they are allowed to work but from half to two thirds time.

We have before us now the facts concerning the wages controversy and must conclude that those who are technically known as miners were not poorly paid if we look at their daily wages, that their condition was not deplorable if we judge by their annual earnings, while in many cases their earnings placed them in the class of well-paid workmen. For those, however, not classed as miners, about three fourths of the mine workers, the conditions were not good if measured by the daily wage, and deplorable when judged by earnings gained on half or two thirds time. The slight improvement in regularity during the last year and a half which the operators contended should satisfy the workmen, has probably been more than offset by the increased cost of living through a general rise of prices.<sup>1</sup> Their wages have remained stationary, and their net earnings have probably remained so, during a period when the country has been generally prosperous and when workingmen everywhere have been able to gain something by an increase of wages.<sup>2</sup> It would seem

<sup>1</sup> The miners announced that the increased cost of living amounted to from 20 to 30 per cent. The operators denied that there had been any material change in the cost of living. As bearing upon this question the following index numbers, taken from the *Quarterly Bulletin* of the Bureau of Economic Research, October 1900, are given. The comparison is made with the average prices for the years 1879-1889. The numbers show the July averages for the years given.

	Breadstuffs	Slaughter products	Dairy products	Print cloth	Sugar refined	Coffee	Flour
1896	59	75	64	66	56	104	61
1897	60	109	61	71	59	59	80
1898	78	102	66	54	64	40	85
1899	74	123	72	74	66	48	71
1900	84	96	80	78	74	75	82

<sup>2</sup> The following table is given in the *Bulletin* of the Department of Labor, No. 30, September 1900, as indicating the trend of wages since 1891. It is believed that the figures "approximate very closely the actual conditions for the whole country."

Year					Relative wages	Year					Relative wages
1891	-	-	-	-	100.00	1896	-	-	-	-	97.93
1892	-	-	-	-	100.30	1897	-	-	-	-	98.96
1893	-	-	-	-	99.32	1898	-	-	-	-	98.79
1894	-	-	-	-	98.06	1899	-	-	-	-	101.54
1895	-	-	-	-	97.88	1900	-	-	-	-	103.42

from the conditions of employment and from the general state of industry that if ever men were justified in asking for an advance of wages the anthracite mine workers were in 1900.<sup>1</sup>

Closely connected with the subject of wages is the powder question. An enormous quantity of this explosive is used in the region, amounting in 1899 to 1,372,691 kegs. In the upper counties, where the controversy over powder applied, the amount used annually for each miner ranges from 50 to 70 kegs. The amount required for a given piece of work varies widely with the skill of the miner in placing his charge, and, as a means of inducing economy, each miner working on contract is required to buy his own powder. Probably 95 per cent. of the powder used at the mines is paid for by the miners. The operators, in order, as they say, to control the quality and the amount taken into the mines, have also claimed the exclusive right of selling the powder. No objection has been made to any of these regulations, but the question of the price charged has been frequently in dispute. It rose in the strike of 1888 in the Schuylkill region. The attitude of the operators was stated by Mr. Whiting, Superintendent of the Reading Coal and Iron Company. While admitting that the powder was sold for more than it cost he held that it was not sold at a profit. "We are not making a profit on the powder at all. We pay for it; it is one of our costs; we lay it in. For instance, we allow them a certain quantity in money for driving a gangway; for this they would get \$10 a yard; \$8 of that would represent labor, the wage element, and the other \$2 would be the allowance for supplies, powder, fuses, and paper for making the cartridges.

<sup>1</sup> No attempt is made here to examine the contention that this particular industry was not in a condition to increase wages. *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* (September 1 and October 13, 1900) is very emphatic in its statements that the companies could not afford to make the advance, and pronounces the strike an "untimely action." In the same issue, however, in reviewing the Reading report the *Chronicle* finds "that the outcome of the year must be considered very satisfactory," as shown in its large increase in gross earnings and other evidences of prosperity. In the same issue comment is also made on the "Progress of Erie." When Reading has a satisfactory year and Erie is making progress, their neighbors may be assumed to be fairly prosperous.

We do not want the miner to waste that. He can have \$2 worth of supplies to drive that yard of gangway. If he uses less it is for his benefit. All that was based on contracts of two years ago. If we changed these prices we should also change the contract, because otherwise it would be that much added to wages.<sup>1</sup>

In March 1888 the Reading Company, "to prevent even an apparent ground of complaint,"<sup>2</sup> made a reduction from \$2.20 to \$1.50 per keg, and that rate has since prevailed in the southern field.<sup>3</sup> In the northern region the charge has been for many years \$2.75, a rate fixed apparently in the seventies. The demand of the miners at the outset of the late strike was for a reduction from this price to \$1.50. This would mean to the miner a saving of from \$62.50 to \$87.50 a year. Against the demand, the same argument as that noted above was employed by the operators: The contracts have all been entered into upon the basis of \$2.75 per keg for the powder used, and any reduction in the price of powder must be in itself regarded as an advance in wages for those whose contracts involve the use of powder. The miners themselves, by asking only for a reduction, and not for powder at cost, seem to adopt the operators' view;<sup>4</sup> and, it must be said, there is something in this contention. The economic adage that an old tax is a good tax has its analogy here. The case of extortion is not so clearly made out against the operators as is generally believed. The question at bottom is as to who is entitled to the fall in the price of powder since the \$2.75 rate was established, the miners or operators. This much may be said without in the least commending the plan of compelling workmen to buy an article at more than double its cost. The plan establishes a false relation between

<sup>1</sup> *Labor Troubles in the Anthracite Region, House Report No 4147*, L. Congress, second session, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Reading Report*, 1888.

<sup>3</sup> *Labor Troubles, etc.*, p. xxxvi.

<sup>4</sup> A letter from one of the strike leaders to the writer insists that powder costs the operator less than \$1 per keg. It is said that it is supplied at the bituminous mines for \$1.25, which yields a liberal profit to the operators.—*Outlook*, September 29, 1900.

employers and employed and invites complaints from the men and criticism from the public.

Part of the miners working on contract had another grievance. Of these some are paid by the yard, measured in the vein, but the greater part are paid according to the amount of coal sent to the surface. The method of weighing each miner's product, so common in the bituminous region, is followed here by only a few operators. One scarcely hears the rate per ton mentioned. The rate is usually based on the "car" or "wagon." There is no uniformity in the size of the cars used. In the southern field they contain from 70 to 120 cubic feet.<sup>1</sup> Coxe Bros. & Co., in the Lehigh region, use a car of 92 cubic feet.<sup>2</sup> In the northern region there is a wide variation. Roughly, a car is counted by the operators as holding 2 tons; by the miners,  $2\frac{1}{2}$  or 3 tons. For anthracite of average density a two-ton car would require a capacity of 96 cubic feet. The complaint of the miners was that, while the price per car had remained the same, there had been a steady increase in the capacity of the cars, both by building them of larger size and by using materials that would permit considerable spread; and that they were required to "top" their cars with more coal than formerly. The frequency with which complaints of these attempts to lower indirectly the wages of the miners have been made creates a strong presumption that the grievance was a real one. The great difficulty has lain in the fact that there has been no recognized standard of measurement; each operator can make his own, and change it at will. This is open to the same objection as would hold against a grocer's making his own standard of weights and measures. He would probably use the power dishonestly, and, if not, would be the object of constant suspicion.

The miners' remedy for this difficulty was the general adoption of the weighing system. They asked for the erection of

<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Superintendent Whiting of the Reading Company.—*Labor Troubles*, etc. L. Congress, second session, *House Report 4147*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 594.

scales at the top of each breaker, where coal is now measured by the car; and that these should be accessible to a committee of their number for examination; that the legal weight of 2240 pounds be taken to constitute a ton; and that they might be allowed to maintain a check weighman at their own expense. All this was attempted in the days of the Workingmen's Benevolent Association. That union, in fact, secured the passage of a weigh law, but through the hostility of the operators, ostensibly on the ground of the great cost it would involve, it never became operative.

The duty of the check weighman was to aid in remedying another abuse—that connected with dockage. The miner inevitably sends up some rock and slate with his coal, through carelessness of himself or laborer he may send up more, and his carelessness may easily pass over into dishonesty. Some check is necessary, and the company supplies this in the "docking boss." He inspects the coal as it comes from the mine, before it goes to the breaker, and sets against the miner the amount of the dockage. The complaint is that the dockage is excessive. There is no precise or uniform method of making the deductions, but the end probably aimed at is to secure a ton or measure of marketable coal for the wages paid. In those few places where coal is weighed an arbitrary weight is fixed—as 2740 pounds (in some cases, it is said, 3340 pounds), the difference between that and a long ton being reckoned as waste in slate and rock and dust.<sup>1</sup> This is not different in spirit from the plan at the bituminous mines of weighing that portion of the coal that runs over screens of a given size and gauge. It is urged by the miners that the dockage has become more severe and the requirements for more coal to the car more burdensome. If this is true, operators have some justification for it on account of the changes which have taken place in the production of coal.

In the first place, there has been a great change in the sizes

<sup>1</sup> See the statement of J. B. Garrett, of the Lehigh Valley Coal Co., *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 18, 1900.

of anthracite sent to market, as is shown by the following figures :<sup>1</sup>

	1880	1890	1899
Domestic sizes (Chestnut and larger) -	20,626,000	28,155,000	31,590,000
Pea, Buckwheat, and smaller sizes -	2,807,000	8,458,000	17,010,000

This increase of small sizes has been due to the declining use of anthracite as a smelting and steam fuel. It is becoming year by year more a domestic fuel; and as it is passed through a succession of heavy crushers to reduce it to the domestic sizes, a large waste occurs in the form of dust of little or no commercial value, and of small sizes that can be sold only at very low prices. Thus, while stove coal was quoted in New York at \$3.51, \$3.53, and \$3.65 for the first three months of 1899, buckwheat was quoted at \$1.77, \$1.82, and \$1.80 for those months, *i. e.*, just about the freight rate charged on the domestic sizes from the mines to tide. Moreover, with the extension of the market has come the necessity of reducing the amount of slate and dirt shipped. The increasing "fastidiousness" of consumers operates in the same direction, till it has become one of the greatest cares of the mine superintendent to send coal from the breaker that will pass a rigid inspection, and at the same time send as little good coal to the culm pile as possible.

The demand of the miners for pay for the gross weight of their output, accompanied by a demand for an increase of wages, must be regarded as somewhat extravagant. Indeed, from the operators' point of view, there has seemed some sort of justification for heavier dockage and larger cars, though not for the way in which they have been secured.

On the other hand, the miners may insist that less coal goes to the culm pile than ever before (though much that is saved is sold at very low prices); that much that has been sent there for which they and their fathers were docked is now being marketed; and that there is something incongruous in the position of the operators when they force their workmen to bear the burden of this unfavorable change in trade conditions, while claiming for themselves the advantages that arise, as in the case of the

<sup>1</sup>SAWARD, *The Coal Trade* (1900), p. 31.



fall in the price of powder. Above all, it may be insisted by them that whatever plan of dockage or weighing is followed, it shall be fairly administered, and no arbitrary changes made in it. It would seem that for such questions as dockage and weighing, what is most needed is some ready means of readjusting relations of employer and employed when they have been disturbed, before an injury to one leads to acts of injury to the other—some means by which complaints may be heard before they have accumulated in such volume as they have reached during the past ten or twelve years, with the almost inevitable result of producing a calamitous strike.

The demand made for the abolition of the company store was generally approved by the public. The evil in the anthracite region has not for some years, however, been either general or burdensome. The incorporated companies are forbidden by a law of 1891 to "carry on what is known as a company store." Many of the unincorporated companies do not do so, and of these there are some of whom no complaint can be made. This is true of Coxe Bros. & Co., who pay their men in cash, and apparently leave them full liberty to trade where they wish. It is true of G. B. Markle & Co., against whom no charge of unfairness in this matter was made when it would have been convenient to have one to make. It is no doubt true of others. But there are some who use their power to the injury of their unwilling customers. If the laws cannot, or will not, protect workingmen against such medieval practices, the men should protect themselves.<sup>1</sup> The same may be said of the "company doctor." Only a few companies make a collection for medical service, and doubtless some of these render all the service that is paid for, to the miners as a whole. It is a plan, however, that is subject to abuse. Even companies of excellent standing are said to have made a profit of \$16,000 per year from the plan.<sup>2</sup> In any case, this

<sup>1</sup> For the attempts to settle the store question in the bituminous regions, see J. E. GEORGE in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, January 1898. See also *Bulletin* of the Department of Labor, November 1897, p. 760.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN MITCHELL, in the *Independent*, November 1, 1900.

method of dealing with employees, like that of the company store, and the furnishing of powder at a profit, establishes a relation between employers and men that is wrong in theory and frequently most pernicious in practice.

It has been charged in various forms that the strike was a political strike. In its baldest form the charge runs that it was called in the interests of the Democratic party. Enough has been brought to light in the past three months to show that it was called in the interest of the mine workers, but it was perfectly natural that a party which had long plumed itself on having brought prosperity to the country, and was making campaign promises for a continuance of prosperity, should regard any display of discontent with existing conditions as an act of hostility toward itself. But labor leaders well know the danger of rousing political prejudices, and they wisely take every precaution to exclude politics from the union. The United Mine Workers have made it one of their cardinal principles to keep politics in every form out of the union. A careful reading of their official organ during the campaign has not disclosed the slightest inclination to meddle with politics. The nearest approach to a political opinion was found in an editorial remark that many people were quite certain that "William would be elected."

Another form of the charge runs that the time of the presidential campaign was shrewdly chosen by the leaders for the advantage it would give them. "They calculated that their employers, remembering the violence and bloodshed of the Homestead strike of 1892, would shrink from invoking a similar outbreak at a time when it might turn to the candidate of agitation all the sentimental sympathizers of the workingman."<sup>1</sup> Whether the leaders counted upon acts of violence which they in every way sought to discourage, may well be doubted; but it is quite probable that they counted the campaign as one of the favorable conditions for a strike. It would be an unfair critic, however, who should find this their chief reason for striking at this time.

<sup>1</sup>*Commercial and Financial Chronicle*, October 13, 1900.

As has been pointed out before, the grievances of the workmen had been of long standing. There had been a long period of recovery for the coal companies from the depression; they had been relieved somewhat from competition from bituminous producers by the advance in wages in the soft coal industry. It was reported on every hand that the anthracite roads had been sharers in the prosperity enjoyed by the railroads throughout the country; Reading, which had almost forgotten what a dividend was, had at last paid one on its preferred stock; the last year had seen 47.6 million tons of coal marketed, as against 43.1, 41.6, and 41.9 millions in the three years previous, and this output had been sold at well sustained prices. It must have occurred to the workmen that if ever the operators could afford to pay an increase of wages it was now. Furthermore, their own condition was probably somewhat better than it had been and they were better able to stand a strike, if it came to that. The union was well organized in the bituminous region and could be relied upon to co-operate with them. The experience of the bituminous miners could be appealed to as showing what a union and a strike could accomplish. Moreover, the season was a favorable one for making new terms. September, October, and November are the busy months of the year. Nearly one third of the annual product is raised in these months. It would seem there were reasons other than political why the strike should be ordered in September 1900.

Complaint has been made by the operators that the strike was precipitated upon them without due notice. This complaint can hardly be justified, even if the operators were ignorant of the feelings of their men on the matters discussed above. With such conditions as they knew to be in existence a strike ought always to be expected. They knew a large convention was called at Hazelton on August 13. On the 16th they received an invitation prepared at this convention to meet in joint conference on a dozen grievances set forth. They knew of the second Hazelton meeting on the 27th, and its resolution to ask permission of the National Council of the United Mine

Workers to strike unless before September 8 the operators should make some overtures. The press was filled with appeals to the operators to settle the difficulties by arbitration. Unselfish efforts were made in the same direction by eminent clergymen and other public men. On September 7 the miners, through their local officers, made a formal proposition to submit their case to arbitration.<sup>1</sup> On the 8th, the national executive board of the union postponed its decision in the hope that an agreement might be reached. It was given out that "powerful influences" were at work to this end, and this was generally understood to mean that those who had a political interest in averting the strike would be able to bring the operators and miners together. This hope failed, and on September 12, after five weeks of constant agitation, the strike order was issued, to take effect the 17th.

Even then the operators did not believe the men would come out. Their estimate was that 10 per cent—about the proportion they conceived belonged to the union—would strike. President Mitchell of the United Mine Workers estimated that 75,000 would go out the first day. His estimate after the event was that 112,000 stopped that day.<sup>2</sup> By the end of the first week the number reached probably 120,000, and before the strike was ended 134,000 had obeyed the call. At the end of the second week of the strike no progress toward a settlement had been made. On October 1 the Reading Company, whose men had perhaps had least cause to strike, posted a notice that it would pay "an advance of 10 per cent. on the net wages of all men and boys about its collieries." It was expected that this would break the line of the strikers, but the result was directly the opposite. On the 3d the Reading, after a conference with other operators, issued a second notice, in which the additional concession of "taking up with their mine employees any grievances which they may have" was made. Similar notices were

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia *Inquirer*, September 8, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> *The United Mine Workers' Journal*, September 20, 1900; and the *Independent*, (New York) November 1, 1900. This is probably an overestimate.

posted during the next few days by most of the operators. A convention of the mine workers was called to meet at Scranton October 12. At this convention it was agreed to "accept an advance of 10 per cent., providing the operators will continue its payment until April 1, 1901, and will abolish the sliding scale in the Lehigh and Schuylkill regions; the scale of wages in the two last named districts to remain stationary at 10 per cent. above the present basis price, and that the companies will agree to adjust other grievances complained of with committees of their own employees." A conference of the principal operators was held at Philadelphia on the 17th, and immediately afterward the Reading, again taking the lead, issued its third notice, announcing that "This company hereby withdraws the notice posted October 3, 1900, and to bring about practical uniformity in the advance of wages in the several coal regions, gives notice that it will suspend the operation of the sliding scale and will pay 10 per cent. advance on September wages until April 1, 1901, and thereafter until further notice, and will take up with its mine employees any grievances which they may have."

It seemed that this would bring the strike immediately to an end. But a complication now arose over the powder question. It will be recalled that the Scranton convention did not make a reduction in the price of powder a condition of resumption. The miners doubtless thought that this would be a grievance for which they could later easily get redress.<sup>1</sup> This must have occurred to the operators also, for in those districts where the powder question had been raised they insisted that it should now be settled. In posting notices of an advance of wages they had explained that powder was to be reduced to \$1.50 per keg, and "that the difference between this rate and the old rate of \$2.75 shall be taken into account in figuring the net advance" for contract work for which powder is used. This was distasteful to the men, but after a few days of hesitation, during which the operators very generally notified their men of the terms of

<sup>1</sup> *The Miners' Journal* (Pottsville), October 18, 1900. This is not a working-man's paper.

resumption, the strike was on the 25th declared at an end and the men advised to return to work on October 29.

The gains already made by the mine workers are substantial and the general agreement of the operators "to take up with their employees any grievances they may have," will doubtless lead to further gain as, *e.g.*, in the enforcement of the semi-monthly payment law, and in the redress of local grievances which many groups of workmen have. The hope has been expressed that some permanent method of taking up and dealing with grievances may be adopted by the various operators as a result of this concession, as by the establishment of schemes of arbitration, or at least by the making of agreements to submit questions to arbitration similar to that existing for many years between G. B. Markle & Co. and their men.<sup>1</sup>

The recent experience of this company, however, will hardly encourage the operators to consider such a method. When the strike was announced an agreement was in force between the company and their men to submit differences to arbitration. Before the strike was declared the employees of this firm had submitted a number of grievances for adjustment, but before any decision had been reached, or the ten days which the company had been given had expired, many of the men had quit work. On September 24 the firm announced its decision on the matters submitted. Some requests were granted, some were denied—as the demand for an increase of wages—and others were to be submitted to arbitration, if the men should so vote. Only those would be allowed to vote, however, who were at work that day. "Those identified with labor organizations have, by

<sup>1</sup>The agreement which all persons entering the employ of the company since 1885 had signed, related to the rate of wages for various kinds of work, the modification of this rate by the Lehigh sliding scale, and to arbitration. The provision for arbitration was as follows: "We further agree that under no consideration will we enter into a strike. Any difficulties we may have with our employers are to be settled by arbitration, viz., by our choosing a competent man and their choosing one, and if these two cannot agree, these two must choose the third, and their decision or the decision of a majority of them to be binding. It is further agreed that we will not be governed by any labor association in settling any difficulties while in the employment of G. B. Markle and Company."

their affiliation, disqualified themselves from acting under our arbitration agreement and are not entitled to vote." Under this ruling only thirty-five men out of a total of 2000 employees voted on the next day<sup>1</sup>. Their vote in favor of arbitration in no way bound the other employees and the collieries were soon closed.

Throughout this controversy the officers of the United Mine Workers used every endeavor to induce the men to stop work contrary to their standing agreement. It may be that the men had not all read the agreement; that they did not fully understand its conditions; that "even were the board of arbitration . . . to award all the men desired, that award could be lived up to by Markle only so long as the strike continued elsewhere;"<sup>2</sup> it may be that the success of the strike would have been endangered if this important group of men had continued at work; still the action of the Union remains one of the most unfortunate incidents of the strike and will tend strongly to discourage—whether rightly or wrongly—the formation of friendly relations between the operators and their men.

This incident will be pointed to by the operators as another proof of the irresponsible character of labor unions and may strengthen their purpose to avoid the recognition of the United Mine Workers. The frequent expressions of the operators during the strike to the effect that they would under no circumstances recognize the union, are in perfect accord with the policy that has been steadfastly followed by them for a quarter of a century. The strike was settled without a word of formal recognition of the union or of communication with its officers. The companies simply notified their employees of what they proposed to do by posting notices at their collieries. As late as October 17 President Mitchell wrote: "I have no official notice that the Reading Company has agreed to the terms of the miners, and it is certain that until some official notice has been received no word will go to the miners and not one of them will

<sup>1</sup> The Philadelphia *Inquirer*, September 26 and 27, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> JOHN MITCHELL, *United Mine Workers Journal*, September 27, 1900.

return to work.”<sup>1</sup> This was not, however, the tone of any of his official communications or of any of the resolutions of miners’ meetings. The question of recognition seems never to have been pressed and was wisely not made a condition of resumption.

What the future of the union will be, therefore, is extremely doubtful. It is strong in numbers and apparently in resources, has able and conservative leaders, and enjoys the prestige of having within three years won two remarkable victories. How it will undergo the ordeal of prosperity and meet the problems left by the strike, remains to be seen. The hope of the leaders is, that some time before April 1, 1901, they may be able to meet the anthracite operators as, most happily for all, they do the operators of the bituminous fields,<sup>2</sup> and arrange a schedule of wages beyond that date. This hope must be shared by all lovers of industrial peace, for through the union more equitable conditions can be secured for operators and miners alike as well as an efficient means of arbitrating difficulties. “To leave the miner with the knowledge, or even with the belief that his voice can reach his employer only after all the noises of the coal-mining industry have been stilled, is to limit him to the strike as the only method of getting redress for his grievances or a hearing for his requests.”

GEORGE O. VIRTUE.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter to the *Chicago Record*, October 18, 1900.

<sup>2</sup> For an account the arrangement between the bituminous operators and their men see J. E. GEORGE, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, July 1898. There is every indication that the plan of co-operation adopted in 1898 has worked with great satisfaction to all concerned.